



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony SUPPORTING SB0850

February 26, 2020

Dear members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

The members of Baltimore for Border Justice are submitting this testimony to urge you to **SUPPORT SB0850**, the Dignity Not Detention Act, which would prohibit future contracts between Maryland jurisdictions and operators of for-profit immigrant detention centers, and end existing contracts with such facilities by October 2021.

Baltimore for Border Justice is an advocacy and service organization founded to address the crisis of inhumanity at our southern border, as well as less tangible borders here at home that divide us based on race, class, gender, and ability. Our members represent a wide range of neighborhoods and organizations across Baltimore. Ending for-profit immigrant detention in our state is a crucial priority in our work for a more humane society. The profit motive should never factor into the decision to incarcerate someone, especially not members of vulnerable populations.

In April 2019, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) advertised for private contractors to open a new Baltimore-area immigration detention center to house up to 800 people. Since these sorts of arrangements invariably involve kickbacks to local governments, this would create a monetary incentive for law enforcement officials in our area to ramp up raids on immigrant communities to fill this new facility and keep the funds flowing. Preying on the bodies of color and breaking up families in the name of profit hearkens back to our shameful history of slave catchers. Not only will undocumented immigrants be targeted, increased ICE presence will also impact documented immigrants and Hispanic Americans. We must not allow indefinite and inhumane incarceration to be synonymous with big business.

One of the companies that responded to the ICE advertisement was Immigration Centers of America (ICA), which runs a private immigrant detention facility in Farmville, Virginia. This facility has a long and dark history of abuses. In October 2011,

Anibal Ramirez-Ramirez, a 35 year-old immigrant from El Salvador, died five days after arriving at the Farmville facility. ICE's own review of the case found that despite severe signs of illness, staff didn't schedule Mr. Ramirez-Ramirez to see a doctor until days after his intake, and, despite several nurses raising concerns, they were at first blocked from even taking his vital signs. When his vital signs were finally taken, the nurse who did so recommended that he be immediately transferred to emergency care due to a perilously high heart rate. Instead, ICA staff decided to continue to wait for his scheduled doctor's appointment in fourteen hours. Mr. Ramirez-Ramirez passed away before he could make that appointment.

Last year, there was a mumps outbreak at the Farmville facility. Detainees were not initially offered vaccinations, and instead were placed on lockdown and denied outside visits. When some detainees started a hunger strike in protest, they reported that they were pepper-sprayed and placed in solitary confinement in retaliation. Other complaints include over-use of force and restraints, lack of religious accommodation, and environmental health concerns. As an example of that last point, ICA Farmville received a waiver in 2013 of the requirement that each detention center have one toilet for every twelve men and one for every eight women, on the basis that it would cost an additional \$400,000 and take thirty days to complete. That waiver is still in place, meaning that ICA Farmville has not had to comply with the rules for seven years.

It would be a disaster for Baltimore to have a detention facility like the one in Farmville come to our area, even if you look at economic factors rather than the value of human life. Baltimore has always been a popular town for new immigrants, and that remains true today – we are one of seven jurisdictions in Maryland where immigrants have stopped or slowed population loss in recent years. According to the nonpartisan Fiscal Policy Institute, immigrants make up 9% of Baltimore's population, but 12% of the workforce. They are more likely to start new businesses and less likely to commit crime. But most importantly, they are people, and we will not see them be used to line the pockets of executives and shareholders, nor will we accept their mistreatment being used to line our own local coffers.

Thank you for your attention and for doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

Baltimore for Border Justice

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